

Letter about Fred Graham

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or Fred Graham Library

Harrison B. French
1513 Sharon Drive
Silver Spring, Md.
April 12, 1961

Mrs. Helen Graham Rezatto
Ellendale, N. Dakota

Dear Mrs. Rezatto:

I am not at all certain that this letter will reach you as it is doubtful if your address is still Ellendale. However, I am taking a chance that it may be forwarded to you if Ellendale is not your present address.

I was highly pleased to read your article in the current Reader's Digest on Dr. Lynde. My attention was attracted to the article at first by the mention of Ellendale. I remembered that I had once known a man from Ellendale whose name was Judge Fred Graham. Then I noted the "Graham" in the name of the writer. I did not have to read long to discover the writer was the daughter of the Fred Graham I had known. May I say that your article was most interesting and very well written. Dr. Lynde turned out to be a highly interesting person, and I can well understand why all Ellendale loved him. But my personal interest was in the brief mention you made of your father, his illness, and his death.

As a young man I was the editor of various Nonpartisan League newspapers in North Dakota, among them the Bowman Farmers Leader, the Wells County Free Press, the McLean County Independent, and the North Dakota Nonpartisan at Bismarck. I attended several League conventions and during them and also during my service on the paper in Bismarck I became acquainted with Judge Graham. He was an exceptionally fine man with definite progressive views. He was considered to be the League wheel horse in Dickey County. I recall that he ran for Congress from the second district.

Here is something that you may not know: in 1926 I was called to Bismarck to become the editor of the North Dakota Nonpartisan, the state organ of the League. I was called by long distance and informed that a meeting was being held in Bismarck at the time of representatives from various parts of the state to prod Governor Sorlie into appointing a U. S. Senator to take the place of Senator Ladd who had died a few months before. John N. Gagan, former Commissioner of Agriculture, and then president of the newspaper board of directors, called me and asked me to come to Bismarck at once and take over the paper. There had been no regular editor for some time and Gerald Nye had been attending to this task as a part-time job. Mr. Hagan explained to me that in response to the prodding by the men who had come to Bismarck (one of whom was Judge Graham) that the Governor had just appointed Gerald Nye to be U. S. Senator. I left for Bismarck at once.

After arriving there I was informed as to how the Governor had made his choice for the appointment. The group met in two rooms in the McKenzie (later Patterson) Hotel with the Governor. He said he would make the appointment, but he wanted this group to indicate its preference. Both Mr. Nye and Mr. Graham were present in this group of about 25 men, making up an unofficial group of self-appointed advisers to the Governor. Governor Sorlie asked each man there to take a slip and write on it the name of the man they preferred as first choice and the man they preferred as second choice. When the slips were filled out the Governor went into an adjoining room for awhile. After a few minutes he came back into the room where the men were and asked Judge Graham and Gerald Nye to come to his office in the Capitol the next morning. They both went there the next morning and spent quite a time waiting for the Governor to get around to disclose what he had asked them to come for. Finally he came in and hemmed and hawed for quite a while, telling each of the men how highly he regarded them. Then suddenly he said, "The reason I am appointing you, Gerald, is ^{that}" I never did hear what the reason was... Some years later Senator Nye told me about this meeting and how surprised he was at his appointment. He said he felt certain that the Governor had in mind the appointment of Judge Graham and he had nearly fallen from his chair when the Governor had picked him.... But I am quite sure that Mr. Nye knew all the time that he would be appointed.

After Governor Sorlie died a couple of years later, Walter Maddock, Lieutenant Governor, became Governor. I was then running the McLean County Independent at Garrison, Walter Maddock's home town was Plaza, northwest of Garrison in the next county. After Walter had been Governor a few weeks his brother Joe Maddock came up from Bismarck and stopped off for a short visit with me in the newspaper office on his way to Plaza. On that visit he said he was helping Walter clean out old papers from the pigeon holes of the Governor's desk and they came upon an envelope containing the ballots of the 25 men who had voted their first and second choice at the McKenzie Hotel. The slips showed that a majority of votes had been cast for Fred Graham rather than for Gerald Nye for first choice. It was a smooth scheme on Sorlie's part. He let the men think they had made the choice and that he had appointed the man they had chosen, when in fact he had done just the opposite. I thought you might be glad to know that the majority had voted for your dad over Nye, and if their will had guided the Governor Fred Graham would have been appointed Senator.

Perhaps this incident was one of the "tough fights" your dad had had that Dr. Lynde referred to at your home that evening.

I have been away from North Dakota for the past 32 years and have lost track of many of the old progressive war horses. The information of your father's death, therefore, came as news to me. It is too bad that such men cannot live forever.

Very truly,

signed
(Harrison B. French)